Alabama Official Prepares to Seek More Indictments in '63 Bombing

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MONTGOMERY, Ala., Nov. 27—The Alabama Attorney General, William J. Baxley, is preparing to seek more indictments in the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. Four young black girls were killed in that blast.

Mr. Baxley stated repeatedly at the murder trial of Robert E. Chambliss, a long-time Ku Klux Klan member accused of setting off the blast, that Mr. Chambliss "was not acting alone."

Mr. Chambliss was convicted Nov. 18 of a count of first-degree murder in connection with the church bombing and was sentenced to life imprisonment. Testimony at his trial indicated that at least two and possibly three others were near the scene within eight hours of the explosion, shortly before church services on Sept. 15, 1963.

The Chambliss attorneys, former Mayor Art Hanes Sr., and his son, Art Jr., are studying an appeal, but in the meantime the crippled, 73-year-old defendant has been transferred for processing to a state penitentiary classification center in Montgomery. The attorneys declined requests for an interview with Mr. Chambliss.

No Special Protection Asked

The elder Mr. Hanes said that he had requested no special protection for Mr. Chambliss, adding, "I feel certain the prison officials will know the implications of this case and will take every precaution for his safety."

Fragments of Mr. Chambliss' past came to the surface at his four-day trial, and members of Mr. Baxley's staff later discussed the dossier put together on the man whom the Birmingha mpolice call "Dynamite Bob" because he had boasted of his ability with explosives.

Although he has an extensive arrest record, until this month he had never been convicted of a serious offense. Records compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other police agencies show that Mr. Chambliss was born Jan. 14, 1904, in Pratt City, a working-class section of Birmingham that is now all black.

He had a limited education and now can write—as he did frequently in the trial—only slowly and laboriously.

First Arrest in 1935

His first arrest, for liquor law violations, is recorded in October 1935. Less than a year later, he was charged with desertion of his first wife and nonsupport of his children. On another occasion he was charged with "flogging while masked." The Attorney General's record does not indicate the disposition of these cases.

Mr. Chambliss' two sons by his first marriage appear to have lost all contact with him and were not present at his trial. The police said they understood that the two sons, now around 50 years of age, are business partners in Florida.

He married for a second time about 20 years ago and lived in a lower-middle-income section of Birmingham that is now rapidly integrating. His small, white frame house was well-tended, and neighbors said that he kept to himself. Several black neighbors expressed astonishment when he was indicted in the church bombing this year, though he had been regarded as a prime suspect from the outset.

Mr. Chambliss' wife did not testify or attend the trial. Defense attorneys said that was because she was ill. Mr. Chambliss said she suffered from high blood pressure.

Another relative, Elizabeth H. Cobbs, a Methodist minister in Birmingham and a niece by marriage to Mr. Chambliss, was a key witness for the prosecution. She testified that her uncle made remarks before and after the bombing that indicated a knowledge of the crime.

Associated Press

Robert E. Chambliss

Mrs. Cobbs told lawyers for the Attorney General's staff that Mr. Chambliss had been "a racial fanatic" as long as she could remember. She said that when she was a teen-ager, her uncle employed her as a seamstress, paying her 50 cents each job to sew Klan emblems on sheets to be worn at Klan rallies.

His record suggests that Mr. Chambliss is a man of violent outbursts. In 1949, when he was working as a mechanic for the City of Birmingham, he smashed the camera of a photographer covering a Klan rally. The Mayor, Cooper Green, dismissed him, but he was not prosecuted.

Even this year, when he was testifying before a grand jury investigating the church bombing, he lunged at a black television photographer, yelling, "I done told that nigger not to take my picture."